

Cook County Advocate

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News for Chicago Metro Area Families

Art and nature room gives kids a break at court

The Cook County Juvenile Court complex is a huge, daunting building from the outside. Inside where adults attempt to untangle cases of abuse and neglect, it can be especially saddening if you are a child. Fortunately, there is a little slice of heaven waiting for children who have to come to court.

The Art and Nature Room is tucked away, just off the beaten path that leads to the main hall of courtrooms. For those who find their way there, it can be like stepping into a world apart from the emotional proceedings elsewhere in the building.

"The things children might hear in the courtrooms could be damaging. We provide a place where children can come and feel safe," said Sylvia McCullum, Executive Director for the Children's Advocacy Rooms of the Cook County Circuit Court.



Sylvia McCullum

Children aged two to 12 can be in the Art and Nature Room while their caregivers or parents conduct court business. Safety is a priority, so the caseworker can help obtain the necessary approv-

als for dropping off and picking up. With the formalities out of the way, it is time to get comfortable or be curious. Children can hang back and read or color. Or the adventurous types can explore the creatures that call the room home. Among the menagerie kept by the staff are the doves Cain and Able, three frogs and numerous fish. The room is also chock full of crayons, craft supplies and books. Just outside of the room is a lovely garden that invites children to come and play.

"A child may cry some when they first come in. But that only lasts a little while. When they see the toys, animals and activities, they have a great time. Then they usually only cry again because they don't want to leave," said McCullum.

While parents can drop in to the Art and Nature Room during the court's business hours, caseworkers can make appointments in advance. The room is a comfortable spot for supervised visits with family members.

The Art and Nature Room at Juvenile Court is one of eight Children's Advocacy Rooms in various locations in the county court system. In a year, more than 20,000 children come to



take a break while their parent files a claim in civil court, requests a restraining order in domestic relations court or testifies at a juvenile court hearing.

During stressful legal proceedings that involve the family, the rooms at Juvenile Court, Domestic Relations and Expedited Child Support will stay busy, particularly during the summer.

"We are here to help the children and the families," said McCullum. "We feel like we can meet a need. Occasionally we receive donations of new clothes, books and toys. Sometimes we surprise parents by giving them something to take home with them, too."

There is always something to do or see in the Art and Nature Room. It is located on the main floor of Juvenile Court, across from the Clerk of the Court office. For more information, call Sylvia McCullum at 312-633-1945.

Cook Central caregivers appreciate an afternoon of excellence

An Afternoon of Excellence was an apt theme for the Cook Central Foster Parent Appreciation Luncheon at the 3518 W. Division office. Foster parents as well as unlicensed relative caregivers were invited to the region's annual event. Formal invitations sent to all of the region's caregivers got their attention and set the tone for the special event. Then as the caregivers entered the room, they were pinned with corsages and boutonnieres and left with goody bags of candy to take home.

Entertainment came by way of "The Expressions of Excellence," a vocal group comprised of DCFS staff that originated at Cook Central. There was a brief program where Acting Regional

Administrator Jose Candelas gave a few words of thanks and appreciation to the group. In addition, Addie Hudson, Associate Deputy for External Affairs, also addressed the group and heaped more accolades on the caregivers.

The luncheon was a catered event and foster parents were served their lunch by staff on that day. Small cards were placed on each table with statements reaffirming how much staff appreciate all of the service that these people have provided to the region and to children in the care of the state.

The region also acknowledged the contributions of two special foster parents who have given decades of dedicated service for children.



Ruby Jones has been fostering for more than 20 years. She recently retired from foster care, but not before establishing permanency for the last two children in her home. Ethylene McReynolds is also sadly retiring from foster care. She has touched countless lives in more than 30 years of working with children. The regional staff wished both ladies the best of luck and promised to remember their commitment.

Cook Central caregivers learn special education rights

The Cook Central Regional Foster Care Advisory held a special training on "Advocating for Students in Special Education and Updates on the Law." This training was to assist parents and others in understanding the process for obtaining an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a child in their care and learning whether the student has a disability.

An IEP process determines and identifies resources that provide specialized instruction necessary for the student to reach annual

goals. The plan drives decisions regarding placement, accommodations and modifications, type and frequency of special education and related services, behavior intervention plans, participation in local and state assessment, promotion and graduation criteria. The determination of eligibility is conducted through a written evaluation describing the provisions for special education and related services for the student with a disability.

The Illinois State Board of Education has developed a Parent's

Guide: "The Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities" to assist parents and others to learn about the educational rights of children who have disabilities and receive special education services. Questions about this information, the process or rights of students found in the Parents' Guide, may be directed to the DCFS Education Advisor for Cook Central, Dawn Overend, at 773-292-7731 or Adrienne Welenc, Lead Foster Parent Support Specialist, at 773-202-7879.

Cook Central training prepares students and caregivers for life after high school

The Educational Access Project at NIU conducted training in Cook Central to plan for the transition of youth leaving high school. This planning helped the student and family begin to think about life after high school. Together they can start to identify long-range outcomes for advanced education or employment that will increase the probability of success after high school.

Angela Foster, from the Division of Service Intervention, provided an overview of several DCFS programs for youth moving to adulthood. She distributed a list of additional community programs to assist youth with completing their high school education by using the Alternative School Network and tutoring programs that are also available to them. She also gave out tip sheets to help engage youth in beginning to plan when they first enter high school.

DCFS programs include:

DCFS Scholarship Program.

There are 48 competitive scholarships offered annually. The application deadline is March 31 of each year. Recipients must maintain a C average to maintain the scholarship, submit all grades and class schedules, and be enrolled as a full-time student.

Youth in College Program.

This is a stipend program to supplement the financial aid

package. Students must maintain a C average and submit a copy of course registration and final grades. The Department has an arrangement where tuition and fees can be waived for students attending Community College.

Youth in Employment. This program is for youth currently in care who have completed high school, completed a GED, or enrolled as a Jobs Corps member. They must complete a one page application, have completed a Life Skills Assessment, submitted a current medical and dental record, and be employed for at least 20 hours a week. DCFS will provide a monthly stipend and provide job readiness skills.

It was clear by the participation of staff and foster parents that everyone in the training had many questions and the staff was well-equipped to answer those questions. For further information, caregivers can contact Holly Bitner, Transition Coordinator, at 312-814-5959. She also keeps office hours on Mondays at the Maywood office where the phone number is 708-338-6696.

Cook County Advocate

Regional Reporters:

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Cook North says thanks to parents

The Cook North Region celebrated Foster Parent Appreciation Month Caribbean style. Foster parents entering the annual appreciation dinner received flowers and sat down to an island-inspired buffet, including paper umbrellas in the punch.

Honored caregivers enjoyed a dance of praise performed by two youth. The program progressed to include remarks from Cliff Kelly, radio personality from WVON. Having followed public affairs in Chicago for decades, he was a champion for the work of dedicated foster parents.

“You see first-hand the outcomes of some of the decisions that other people make. You take care of it and fix the problems,” Kelly told the crowd. “You deserve to be commended.”

The regional administrative team, with help from the Northeast Foster Parent Association and staff, went out of their way to be certain the all the region's foster parents had an opportunity to see how special they are.



Cook North LANs help with school issues

Within the Cook North Region, there are 12 Local Area Networks (LANs). LANs are a geographically-based network of service providers, community members, agencies and parents that come together to promote community-based service delivery and support to children and families.

Community agencies within the LANs that contract with DCFS will be focusing resources on educational needs. Caregivers can look to the LANs for help with issues such as truancy, suspensions or expulsions. The LANs are gearing up with many new programs to serve youth at risk of dropping out and to ensure their educational success. Below are the LAN numbers encompassing Cook North communities:

- 37a New Trier and Northfield townships, including: Glen-coe, Glenview, Kenilworth, Northbrook, Northfield, Winnetka and Wilmette.
- 38a Wheeling Township, including: Wheeling and parts of Buffalo Grove and Mt. Prospect
- 40 City of Evanston and the Evanston Township community
- 41 Niles Township and the Skokie, Niles and Morton Grove communities
- 42 Maine and Elk Grove Township communities
- 45 Barrington and Palatine township communities
- 46 Schaumburg and Hanover Park Townships

- 61 Leyden and Norwood Park Townships
- 63 Northwest side of Chicago, including: Albany Park, Belmont-Craigin, Dunning, Edison Park, Forest Glen, Hermosa, Irving Park, Jefferson Park, Montclare, Norwood Park, Portage Park and the O'Hare community areas
- 65 Lake Michigan west to the Chicago River and from Roosevelt Road north to the Chicago city limits
- 76 Chicago's Near South Side including most of the Bronzeville area, Armour Square, Douglas and the Oakland community areas
- 80 Fuller Park, Grand Boulevard, Kenwood, Washington Park, Hyde Park and Woodlawn communities

For information on any specific LAN or program, please contact your local LAN liaisons:

- LANs 37a, 38a, 40 & 41
Joanne Nett
8100 McCormick
847-745-3049
- LANs 42, 45, 46 & 61
JoAnn Niemuth
8100 McCormick
847-745-3048
- LANS 63, 65 & 76
John Czarnecki
2501 W. Bradley
773-866-5683
- LAN 80
Lucille Pearson
1911 S. Indiana
312-328-2313

The Student Empowerment Program— Evanston, LAN 40

Beginning this fiscal year, the LAN 40 Family Centered Service Program has switched its name to the Student Empowerment Program. This program is being administered by the Youth Organization Umbrella (Y.O.U.). The program is directed at Evanston families with school-aged children who have a history or are at risk of truancy, suspension or expulsion from schools.

The purpose of the program is to help youth attend school on a more regular basis and reach their educational goals. The focus of the program is to empower parents or caregivers to make healthy decisions on behalf of their children, linking them up with academic enrichment programs and tracking their progress.

Services are time-limited for three to six months and may include:

- Assistance in school enrollment
- Coordinating transportation to and from school
- Resource planning
- Assistance with coordinating IEP assessments
- Advocacy to schools and teachers

- Attendance at school staffings and efforts to create educational support teams
- Enrollment in one of Y.O.U.'s four academic programs (elementary through middle school) and
- Wraparound coordination

"It has been a very exciting time as the LANs shift to focus on educational needs. The services that Youth Organization Umbrella and other LAN-based programs now offer will go along way in helping youth succeed in school," said Michael Barnes, Statewide LAN Coordinator.

"Providing students and the caregivers with more educational resources is an investment that the Department is eager to make."

Referrals will be accepted from parents, the Evanston schools, community agencies and the Foster Parent Support Program at Family Focus. Targeted schools include: Chute, Nichols, and Haven Middle Schools and Evanston Township High School.

For more information regarding this program, please contact: Alison Kramme, Clinical Director at 847-866-1200.

People You Should Know: **Cook North** Education Advisors



*Deseree
Edwards*



*Donnis
Briscoe*

To help you advocate for your children's educational needs, the regional advisors have several suggestions:

- "Trust your guts"—if you see something that leads you to believe that your child is struggling in school, explore the issue with your child, caseworker, teacher or education advisor
- Become comfortable in your role as an advocate for your child's education by participating in the educational advocacy training and asking questions about issues and terms that are unfamiliar—don't be afraid to ask for help!
- Talk about how you manage the child at home
- Make yourself known and establish a presence in your child's school—schools are much more supportive and cooperative if they have a willing and invested parent!

The Cook North Education Advisors are located at 1911 S. Indiana. The phone number is 312-328-2673.

Cook South showered foster parents (and staff) with appreciation

On May 20, 2005, Cook South Staff and its Foster Parent Support Specialists hosted a dinner at the Harvey Office to honor their foster parents. The dinner only represented a token of the staff's appreciation. Dr. George Smith, of Management Planning Institute, was the guest speaker. He is a favorite of the Cook South Foster Parent Support Group. As usual, his motivational speech and touches of humor put the audience in high spirits. Music, prizes, and an excellent program contributed to this festive affair. The meal, which included a variety of dishes, topped off the evening.

Although all of the foster parents received recognition, several had been nominated by staff to receive special awards because of the extra mile they went to work with DCFS to provide for the

needs and well being of the children in care. Among those honored that night were:

- Lazenja Adams
- Mary Fullilove
- Kim Acklin
- Frank Lumpkins

Sometimes the best way to show appreciation is just by doing a good job for someone. Jean Tate, a foster parent, knew her parenting efforts were appreciated by the performance of Theresa Ferguson, a case manager for the foster family. Ferguson did so much to encourage the family that Tate had to send a letter to her supervisor.

"Theresa not only forms a bond with the children on her caseload, but works relentlessly with the foster parents to ensure that their needs are met as well," Tate wrote. "She has always been only a phone call away, and does not mind sacrificing her own time if need be."

Foster Parent Support Specialists were also able to "spread the love" and show appreciation for Harold Dixon, Resource Manager. In five years of working with the advo-



Lazenja Adams was one of four foster parents to receive special recognition from Cook South's Regional Administrator Michael Byrd (right).

cates they found him invaluable in solving complex problems for foster parents.

"His sincere desire to help and guide us has been extraordinary. Though we are only foster parent advocates, he treats us with the dignity and respect that any other staff member is treated. He really sees us as part of the team," they wrote in a letter to Dixon.

The good feelings kept coming the following week at an appreciation luncheon to also honor caregivers who had adopted children. May was a very good month to be a foster parent in the Cook South region.



Cook South foster parents joined staff at the Harvey office for an appreciation dinner.

Caregivers to teens get instruction, inspiration

For the better part of a Saturday, 87 caregivers from the Cook county regions came together to celebrate and commiserate as they learned more about parenting older youth. The DCFS Division of Clinical Practice and Professional Development prepared this specialized Caregivers Institute, "The Ins and Outs of Parenting Adolescents and Teens," to fill a pressing need. The parents who attended the training seemed eager for information on how to effectively give love and guidance to young people as they make their way toward a successful adulthood.

Cook South's Regional Administrator Michael Byrd, welcomed the participants. The workshops then started with youth involved with the Young Researchers Project of the University of Illinois sharing their personal experiences in foster care. That set the stage for the adults to better understand the youth's perspective as they learned how to work together in a family setting. From there, the audience discovered the myriad resources within the DCFS Division of Service Intervention to help families prepare young people for self-sufficiency. Education Advisor Diane Fitzhugh then explained various educational opportunities for youth. She also covered how school policies on suspensions and expulsions can

affect students with special educational needs and how caregivers can be good advocates.

After refueling with a hearty lunch, the caregivers were ready to learn about the physical and emotional development of older youth. Dr. Michael Wonderlich of the DCFS Clinical Division explained that there are real biological reasons behind sometimes perplexing teen behaviors. In the final session of the day, Listening So Teens Will Talk, Terry Liggitt of Prevent Child Abuse Illinois offered many recommendations to help adults and teens communicate better. By the end of the session, caregivers appeared refreshed and ready to relate better with the young people in their families.

"This day was so successful, we're already looking forward to doing it again in Spring 2006. Plans are underway and notice will be in future editions of this newsletter," said Ray Gates, acting chief, Office of Foster Parent Support Services.

The training also included brochures from many programs, as well as many helpful articles. Those who would like more information or a copy of the materials can call 217-524-2422.

2nd annual Walk and Rally Against Child Abuse

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), along with community-based organizations in the Englewood area, hosted its 2nd Annual Walk and Resource Rally Against Child Abuse and Neglect. The purpose of the event was to increase awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect in April, as well as to educate community residents on how and where to seek help.

Featured speakers included DCFS Director Bryan Samuels, Chicago Police Department Deputy Superintendent Dana Starks, and Chief Juvenile Justice Kathy Bankhead. Retired Chicago Bulls basketball player Rob Love attended, as well as staff from participating organizations, and families throughout the Englewood community. The event also featured information resource tables, health screenings for children, face painting, a clown, music and refreshments provided by Dominick's Finer Foods and Jamba Juice.



Cook County Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 3 - *Child Development* - New module being written

Module 4 - *Child Sexual Development and Sexual Abuse* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal & Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Fostering Experience* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

COOK NORTH

Module

City Colleges of Chicago

Aug. 30, 6:30-9:30 p.m. 2
Sept. 1 & 6 (Tue/Thu)

Association House - Spanish

Sept. 17 (Sat) & 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 1
Sept. 24 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

COOK SOUTH

Module

DCFS Harvey Office

Sept. 10 (Sat) & 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 5
Sept. 17 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

LSSI

Sept. 19, 21, 26, 28 & 6:30-9:30 p.m. 10
Oct. 3 (Mon/Wed)

St. Bernard's Hospital

Sept. 13, 15 & 20 (Tue/Thu) 6-9 p.m. 2

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Please call Harold Washington College for a listing of upcoming training dates and times.

All classes are coordinated by
Harold Washington College in Chicago.
Call **312-553-5821** or **-3031** to register.



The DCFS Lending Library is a resource to allow foster and adoptive parents access to a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life. The materials span 17 categories.

Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge. The order form is available in the 3rd Edition of the Lending Library Catalog, which can be viewed on the DCFS web site at www.state.il.us/dcfs.

**For more
information call:**

**Champaign Area
888-467-6065**

**Peoria Area
888-507-7433**

**Springfield Area
888-817-1875**